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ABSTRACT

School psychology consultants are confronted with consultees who must learn to take advantage of the consultation process for their own ends. This study explored teachers' subjective experiences of being consultees receiving services from school psychologists. Ten teachers were interviewed about five categories of consultee learning needs. Results show a recurring theme regarding the efficacy of school psychology consultation: the practicality of classroom interventions designed to remediate student difficulties. Teachers voiced concern about the design and implementation of these classroom interventions. It is important that school psychologists anticipate this issue as a learning need. School psychologists should work to reduce the perception of an expert model of consultation. Teachers need to be encouraged to assert themselves as equal partners in collaborative problem solving. Part of the role and responsibility of the school psychologist, therefore, is to empower teachers in using consultation effectively to meet their needs. The study has implications for school psychologists as consultants in becoming sensitive facilitators of consultation relationships and in enhancing problem-solving collaboration with classroom teachers. (MKA)

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SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY CONSULTATION FROM THE CONSULTEE'S PERSPECTIVE

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Poster presented at the annual meeting of the National Association of School Psychologists, March, 2000 New Orleans LA. This study was supported by a Rhode Island College Faculty Research Grant.

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ABSTRACT

School psychology consultants are confronted with consultees who must learn to take advantage of the consultation process for their own ends. This study explored teachers' subjective experience of being a consultee receiving consultation services from school psychologists. Several learning needs of teachers as consultees were identified. By being aware of what the consultee must learn, the consultant may facilitate the consultation process to enhance the consultee's professional competency.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY CONSULTATION FROM THE CONSULTEE'S PERSPECTIVE

In 1988, Reschly predicted that special education reforms would transform the role of a school psychologist from tester to consultant. Indeed, during the 1990s, school psychology testing practices have changed radically from assessments designed to determine special education classifications and special class placements to problem-solving consultation and collaboration oriented toward interventions in natural classroom settings (see for example, School Psychology Quarterly, 1998 Vol. 13, No. 4). Consultation is a complex, dynamic, and indirect service delivery model whereby school psychological intervention strategies designed to assist students in classrooms are delivered by teachers (Erchul & Martens, 1997). . Therefore, the perspectives of consultees, that is, teachers, are important in judging the success of consultation and in identifying barriers to consultation.

Caplan (1970) stated that "the need for consultation and its value may rise with increasing competence of the consultee" (p.24). In order to benefit from schocl psychology consultation, a consultee must acquire new understandings about professional collaboration (Mostert, 1998). An effective consultant is aware of the different kinds of learning facing a consultee; consequently, the consultant facilitates this learning so that the relationship can develop to the point where it enhances the consultee's professional competence. By obtaining consultees' perspectives on the consultation process, the various learning needs of consultees may be outlined. The findings

may be used to sensitize school psychologists to those learning needs so that they may facilitate the consultee's experience in adapting to the consultation relationship.

Procedures

The conceptual framework for this study draws upon the early work of Lambert and Sandoval (1974, 1975, 1977) concerning the nature of consultation relationships. Consultants must help consultees learn their role in order to facilitate a relationship from which the consultee will benefit. One objective of the study, then, was to explore the teachers' subjective experience of being a consultee. A purposive sampling plan was used to ensure that responses were obtained from teachers with relevant school psychology consultation experience. This descriptive, exploratory study of the consultation process was the method of choice because it focused on the experience of the consultee through face-to-face discussions, which provided an opportunity to discover common perspectives. Ten teachers who consulted with a school psychologist concerning classroom problems were interviewed about five categories of consultee learning needs:

1. How is consultation different than other work-related interactions that you have had with the school psychologist?

Because teachers may have had other interactions with a school psychologist, the first learning involves distinguishing how consultation differs from these other experiences. Teachers spoke about needing to take the initiative to contact the school psychologist about a problem.

2. Is it difficult to communicate the nature of a specific problem to the school psychologist?

Teachers discussed the process of learning to participate in consultation and acknowledging their responsibility in continuing to work with the consultant to solve the problem.

3. How do you collaborate in solving the problem?

The teachers explained their understanding of the consultant's role, often in terms of an expert.

4. Is the school psychologist able to understand practical matters that you may encounter in implementing an intervention strategy in your classroom?

Teachers' expectations for consultation were addressed. Many consultees complained that school psychology consultants lack knowledge of practical matters in the consultee's work, particularly, time constraints and managing large groups.

5. How have you become a more effective teacher after consulting with the school psychologist?

One goal of consultation is to increase the consultee's self-knowledge to help him become a more effective practitioner. Teachers did not feel consultation increased their overall effectiveness as classroom teachers.

Discussion

A recurrent theme regarding the efficacy of school psychology consultation from the teachers' perspectives centered on the practicality of classroom interventions designed to remediate student difficulties. A sample of teachers' comments follows:

"Sometimes interventions are not possible with over 20 students in the class and are not practical in the real classroom ."

"Until the classroom teacher's input is an integral part and the classroom observation is more realistic, I do not see consultation helping."

"The follow-up on interventions fail."

"It is important that the school psychologist look at the teacher with credibility and realize that some students will not respond positively in any classroom setting."

"The school psychologist should visit the classroom before making final decisions on interventions."

Teachers voiced concern about the design and implementation of classroom interventions. It is important that school psychologists anticipate this issue as a learning need. School psychologists should work to reduce the perception of an "expert" model of consultation. Teachers need to be encouraged to assert themselves as equal partners in collaborative problem-solving. Part of the role and responsibility of the school psychologist, therefore, is to empowered teachers in using consultation effectively to meet their needs.

Consultation has become a major thrust in delivering psychological services in schools in this era of educational reform. Focusing on the consultation relationship is critical because communication is key in all phases of the process and student outcomes depend upon the effectiveness of consultation. This study examined the consultation process from the perspective of consultees (classroom teachers) by focusing on their learning needs. The study has implications for school psychologists as consultants in becoming sensitive facilitators of consultation relationships and in enhancing problem-solving collaboration with classroom teachers.

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